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BEN JONSON
AND
THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL

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BEN JONSON AND THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL.

"The words, *classical* and *romantic*, although, like many other critical expressions, sometimes abused by those who have understood them vaguely or too absolutely, yet define two real tendencies in the history of art and literature. * * * The 'classic' comes to us out of the cool and quiet of other times, as the measure of what a long experience has shown will at least never displease us. And in the classical literature of Greece and Rome, as in the classics of the last century, the essentially classical element is that quality of order in beauty, which they possess, indeed, to a pre-eminent degree. * * * It is the addition of strangeness to beauty, that constitutes the romantic character in art; and the desire of beauty being a fixed element in every artistic organisation, it is the addition of curiosity to this desire of beauty that constitutes the romantic temper."¹

These are the words of that rare interpreter of the "House Beautiful," the late Mr. Walter Pater, and may serve us as a starting position whence to depart in a search for the origin of some of those elements which combined to produce the many and noteworthy changes that came over English literature during the seventeenth century.

Without entering here into definitions and distinctions which have been much aired and not a little abused, it is well to notice that these terms are not necessarily hostile to each other or even mutually exclusive. Classicism and Romanticism are tendencies rather than opposed methods in art. Literature has always partaken of both, although one may dominate in one age, the other in another. It may be surmised that in the ebb and flow of these elements consists the life of literature, and that in the absolute triumph of either lies its destruction: for death may come to art no less from

¹ Walter Pater, *Appreciations*, "Postscript," p. 253 f.

freedom run to licence than from the riveted fetters of absolute convention. In a sense every 'classic' has once contained within it the 'romantic,' has once moved by its novelty and appealed to curiosity. If the romantic temper is more concerned with the choice of subject, as has sometimes been affirmed, there may be even a finer art in novelty of treatment; nor may novelty be denied although it consist but in the change from romantic excesses grown common and hence distasteful. Be this as it may, the classic temper studies the past, the romantic temper neglects it. The romantic temper is empirical; in its successful experiments it leads us forward, as did Wordsworth, Shelley and Browning, and creates new precedents on which to found the classics of the future. It is revulsion from the failures of romantic art that brings us trooping back to the classics with Matthew Arnold who felt that he could "find the only sure guidance, the only solid footing among the ancients."¹

The history of English literature since the Renaissance exhibits three periods of unusual interest in the models of the past, three notable returns to the classics as they were understood in each age, with a possible fourth period of interest yet to come and widely presaged in our many retranslations of Greek and Roman authors and in the poetry of Matthew Arnold and the late Mr. William Morris. With this last we have nothing to do; an important name is identified with each of the other three: Sir Philip Sidney, whose classicism was concerned with externals, and soon overwhelmed with the flood of romanticism on which he was himself "the first fair freight;" Ben Jonson, whose classicism came alike by nature and by study; Pope, who long after stands for the culmination of a movement which, losing its aims and substituting too often mere form for living principle, is none the less worthy of a greater respect and consideration than has been usually accorded it at the hands of the critics of our century.

¹ Preface to Arnold's *Poems*, ed. 1854.

That minor contemporaries of Sidney like Ascham, Webbe, and Gabriel Harvey should look to classic example for the salvation of English letters is little to be wondered. Their education demanded it, and contemporary literature offered nothing. Save Chaucer, there was not an English poet that a scholar dared to name with the mighty dead of "insolent Greece or haughty Rome;" and Chaucer was antiquated to the Elizabethan, who might love to archaize in the pastoral lingo of Hobbinol and Cuddy, but who was likely to leave unread what he could not readily conform to his own time and place. The classicism of Sidney is that of his age, and shows itself mainly in two characteristics: the reaffirmation of ancient aesthetic theory, in which the *Defense of Poesy* far outweighs all similar contemporary work, and in metrical experiments in English verse modelled on classical prosody. In the former Sidney was the companion of Gascoigne, James VI, William Webbe, and George Puttenham; in the latter, of Harvey, Stanihurst, Abraham Fraunce, and Spenser himself. If Sidney's sapphics and asclepiads stand as a warning to the temerity of venturesome youth, it must be remembered that our own contemporaries have not ceased from theorizing upon such metres nor indeed from imitating them. Such turning to the classics as Sidney's and Spenser's is purely empirical and due less to any deep seated conviction on the subject than to a contemplation of the dead level of contemporary literary achievement. Sidney's *Defense* was directly called forth by Gosson's attack upon poetry in his *School of Abuse*, and Sidney's own practice of classical metres went hand in hand with experiments in the Italian sonnet, the canzone and the sestina, many specimens of which are to be found in *Astrophel and Stella*, and in the *Arcadia*. Lastly, it would be difficult to find a work farther removed from classical ideals than the famous *Arcadia* itself, the story of which vies with the *Faerie Queene* in rambling involution and elaborated episode, the style of which is ornate and florid, though often very beauti-

ful, the essence of which, in a word, is novelty, the touchstone of romantic art.

Vastly in contrast with this superficial imitation of classical verse is the classicism of Ben Jonson, from his character as a man and a scholar, and in its relation to his environment. Between Sidney, dead in the year 1586, and Jonson beginning his career but a year or two short of the next century, a great literature had sprung up, which up to the end of the reign of Elizabeth and, without the domain of the drama, was dominated by the overwhelming influence of Spenser. It would be difficult to find a contrast more marked than that which exists between Spenser and Jonson. As the qualities of these two poets in their contrasts are at the very root of our subject, they must be considered in some detail.

What may be called the manner of Spenser—*i. e.*, Spenser's way of imitating and interpreting nature artistically by means of poetic expression—may be summarized as consisting of a sensuous love of beauty, involving a power of elaborated pictorial representation, a use of classical imagery for decorative effect, a fondness for melody of sound, a flowing sweetness, naturalness and continuousness of diction, amounting to diffuseness at times, the diffuseness of a fragrant, beautiful, flowering vine. We may say of the poets that employ this manner that they are worshipers of beauty rather than students of beauty's laws; ornate in their expression of the type, dwelling on detail in thought and image lovingly elaborated and sweetly prolonged. To such artists it is no matter if a play have five acts or twenty-five, if an epic ever come to an end, or if consistency of parts exist. Rapt in the joy of gentle onward motion, in the elevation of pure, poetic thought, even the subject seems to be of small import, if it but furnish the channel in which the bright limpid liquid continues musically to flow. Drayton, who, besides pastorals after the manner of his master, Spenserized the enormous *Polyolbion*; the allegorical Fletchers, Giles and Phineas; George Wither and William Browne in their beautiful later

pastorals; Milton himself in his earliest poetry, though somewhat restrained by a chaster taste than was Spenser's and by a spirit in closer touch with the classics: these are some of the multitude of followers and imitators of Spenser.

If now we will turn to the poetry of Ben Jonson, more especially his lyrical verse, the first thing we note is a sense of form, not merely in detail and transition, like the "links . . . bright and even" of *The Faerie Queene*, but a sense of the entire poem in its relation to its parts. This sense involves brevity and condensity of expression, a feeling on the part of the poet that the effect may be spoiled by a word too much—a feeling which no true Spenserian ever knew. It is thus that Jonson writes in courtly compliment to his patroness Lucy, Countess of Bedford:

This morning timely rapt with holy fire,
I thought to form unto my zealous Muse,
What kind of creature I should most desire,
To honor, serve, and love, as poets use.
I meant to make her fair, and free, and wise,
Of greatest blood, and yet more good than great;
I meant the day-star should not brighter rise,
Nor lend like influence from his lucent seat.
I meant she should be courteous, facile, sweet,
Hating that solemn vice of greatness, pride;
I meant each softest virtue there should meet,
Fit in that softer bosom to reside.
Only a learnèd and a manly soul
I purposed her; that should, with even powers,
The rock, the spindle, and the shears control
Of Destiny, and spin her own free hours.
Such when I meant to feign and wished to see,
My Muse bade Bedford write, and that was she.¹

About such poetry as this there is a sense of finish rather than of elaboration. It is less continuous than complete; more concentrated, less diffuse; chaste rather than florid; controlled, and yet not always less spontaneous; reserved, and yet not always less natural. There are other things

¹*Epigrams*, No. LXXVI, Fol. 1640, i, 22.

in the Jonsonian manner. It retained classical allusion less for the sake of embellishment than as an atmosphere—to borrow a term from the nomenclature of art. Its drafts upon ancient mythology become allusive, and the effects produced by Horace, Catullus or Anacreon are essayed in reproduction under English conditions. / Not less eager in the pursuit of beauty than the Spenserian, the manner of Jonson seeks to realize her perfections by means of constructive excellence, not by entranced passion. It concerns itself with choiceness of diction, selectiveness in style, with the repression of wandering ideas and loosely conceived figures, / in a word the manner of Jonson involves classicality. Sidney's return to the ancients has been called empirical; the classicism of Jonson may be termed assimilative.

It is a commonplace of the history of literature that Jonson literally dominated the age in which he lived. But it is not so generally understood just why this was true in the face of the unexampled popularity of Shakespeare's plays and the frequent failure of Jonson's own, and with the existence of strong poetical counter-influences which seemed more typical of the spirit of the time than Jonson's own. It is notable that it is the egotists, like Byron and Rousseau, that often most strongly impress themselves upon their own times; they are; in Ben Jonson's well known words, "of an age;" those who have mastered themselves and risen, as did Shakespeare, above his own environment while still sharing it, move in larger circles, and influence the world "for all time." Shakespeare was not literary, Jonson was abundantly so. Despite Shakespeare's popular success, Jonson had with him the weight of the court and the learned. Thus it came about that Shakespeare enjoyed the greatest pecuniary return derived from literature, directly or indirectly, until the days of Sir Walter Scott; whilst Jonson, dependent on patronage, often almost in want, achieved a reputation and an influence in literature altogether unsurpassed up to his time. There was only one poet who shared even in part

this literary supremacy of Jonson, and that poet was John Donne. To Donne, especially to the Marinist in him, must be granted the credit—if credit it be—of delaying for more than a generation the natural revulsion of English literature back to classicism and restraint. This is not the place in which to discuss the interesting relations of Jonson and Donne. Except for a certain rhetorical and dialectical address, which might be referred to a study of the ancients, the poetry of Donne is marked by its disregard of conventions, by its extraordinary originality of thought and expression, by that rare quality of poetic insight that justifies Jonson's enthusiastic claim that "John Donne [was] the first poet in the world in some things."¹ Not less significant on the other hand are Jonson's contrasted remarks to Drummond on the same topic: "That Donne's *Anniversary* [in which true womanhood is idealized if not deified] was profane and full of blasphemies," and "that Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging."² The classicist has always regarded the romanticist thus, nor have the retorts been more courteous, as witness the well known lines of Keats' *Sleep and Poetry* in which the age of classicism is described as "a schism nurtured by foppery and barbarism."³

Thus we find Spenser and Jonson standing as exponents respectively of the expansive or romantic movement and the repressive or classical spirit. In a different line of distinction Donne is equally in contrast with Spenser, as the intensive, or subjective artist. Both of these latter are romanticists in that each seeks to produce the effect demanded of art by means of an appeal to the sense of novelty; but Spenser's romanticism is that of selection, which chooses from the outer world the fitting and the pleasing, and constructs it into a permanent artistic joy. Donne's is the romanticism of insight, which, looking inward, describes the subtle relations of things and transmutes them into poetry with a sudden and unex-

¹ *Jonson's Conversations with Drummond*, Shakespeare Society, 1842, p. 8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³ *Poems by John Keats*, ed. Bates, 1896, p. 59.

pected flood of light. Between Jonson and Donne there is the kinship of intellectuality; between Spenser and Donne the kinship of romanticism; between Spenser and Jonson the kinship of the poet's joy in beauty. Spenser is the most objective and therefore allegorical and mystical; Donne is the most subjective and the most spiritual; Jonson, the most artistic and therefore the most logical.

But not only did Jonson dominate his age and stand for the classical ideal in the midst of current Spenserianism, Marinism, and other popular modes, it was this position of Jonson, defended as it was in theory as well as exemplified in his work, that directed the course which English literature was to take for a century and a half after his death. There are few subjects in the history of English literature attended with greater difficulty than the attempt to explain how the lapse of a century in time should have transformed the literature of England from the traits which characterized it in the reign of Queen Elizabeth to those which came to prevail under the rule of Queen Anne. The salient characteristics of the two ages are much too well known to call for a word here. Few readers, moreover, are unfamiliar with the more usual theories on this subject: how one critic believes that Edmund Waller invented the new poetry by a spontaneous exercise of his own cleverness;¹ how another demands that this responsibility be fixed upon George Sandys.² How some think that "classicism" was an importation from France, which came into England in the luggage of the fascinating Frenchwoman, who afterwards became the Duchess of Portsmouth; and how still others suppose that the whole thing was really in the

¹ Gosse, *Eighteenth Century Literature*, p. 2.

² Henry Wood, "Beginnings of the 'Classical' Heroic Couplet in England:" "At all events it was Sandys, and not Waller, who at the beginning of the third decade of the century, first of all Englishmen, made a uniform practice of writing in heroic couplets which are, on the whole, in accord with the French rule, and which, for exactness of construction, and for harmonious versification, go far towards satisfying the demands of the later 'classical' school in England."—*American Journal of Philology*, XI, p. 73.

air, to be caught by infection by anyone who did not draw apart and live out of the literary miasma as did Milton.¹ It may not be unnecessary to add that some of these theorists place the beginning and end of "classicism" in the definite and peculiar construction of a certain species of English decasyllabic verse; and that even when they escape this, the "heroic" or "Popean couplet" has always usurped an undue share of consideration.

The conservative reaction which triumphed with the Restoration has been so "hardly entreated" and so bitterly scorned that there is much temptation to attempt a justification. Imaginative literature did lose in the change, and enormously; but if the imagination, and with it the power that produces poetry, became for a time all but extinct, the understanding, or power which arranges, correlates, expounds and explains, went through a course of development which has brought with it in the end nothing but gain to the literature considered as a whole.

If the reader will consider the three great names, Ben Jonson, finishing his work about 1635, John Dryden, at the height of his fame fifty years later, and Alexander Pope, with nearly ten years of literary activity before him a century after Jonson's death, he will notice certain marked differences in a general resemblance in the range, subject-matter and diction of the works of these three. The plays of Jonson, despite the restrictive character of his genius, exemplify nearly the whole spacious field of Elizabethan drama, with an added success in the development of the masque, which is Jonson's own. Jonson is the first poet that gave to occasional verse that variety of subject, that power and finish, which made it, for nearly two centuries, the most important form of poetical expression. The works of Jonson are pervaded with satire, criticism and translation, though all appear less in set form than as applied to original work. Finally Jonson's lyrics

¹ Gosse, *From Shakespeare to Pope*, p. 19.

maintain the diversity, beauty and originality which distinguishes this species of poetry in his favored age.

If we will turn now to Dryden, we still find a wide range in subject, although limitations are discoverable in the character of his dramas and of his lyrics. If we except his operas and those pseudo-dramatic aberrations in which he adapted the work of Shakespeare and Milton, Dryden writes only two kinds of plays, the Heroic Drama and the Comedy of Manners; whilst his lyrics, excepting the two odes for Saint Cecilia's Day and some perfunctory religious poems, are wholly amatory in the narrow and vitiated sense in which that term was employed in the time of Charles II. The strongest element of Dryden's work is occasional verse; and he makes a new departure, showing the tendency of the time, in the development of what may be called occasional prose: the preface and dedicatory epistle. Satire takes form in the translation of Juvenal and in the author's own brilliant original satires, translation becomes Dryden's most lucrative literary employment, and criticism is the very element in which he lives. Lastly, we turn to Pope. Here are no plays and very few lyrics, scarcely one which is not an applied poem. Occasional verse, satire, criticism, and translation have usurped the whole field. There was no need that Pope should write his criticism in prose, as did Dryden; for verse had become in his hands essentially a medium for the expression of that species of thought which we in this century associate with the prose form. The verse of Pope was a medium more happily fitted for the expression of the thought of Pope, where rhetorical brilliancy and telling antithesis rather than precision of thought was demanded, than any prose that could possibly have been devised.

It has often been affirmed that England has the greater poetry, whilst France possesses the superior prose; and in the confusion or distinction of the two species of literature this difference has been explained.¹ Poetry must be governed

¹ See in general Matthew Arnold's essay on "The Literary Influence of Academies."

by the imagination, it must not only see and imitate nature, it must transform what it sees, converting the actual into the terms of the ideal: if it does much beside, it is less poetry. On the other hand, prose is a matter of the understanding, to call in as helps whatever other faculty you will, but to be ruled and governed by the intelligence alone, to the end that the object may be realized as it actually is. With this distinction before us, when passion, real or simulated, when imagination, genuine or forced, takes the reins from the understanding, the product may become poetry, or enthusiasm, or rhapsody; it certainly ceases to be prose, good, bad or indifferent. So, likewise, when the understanding supplants imagination, we have also a product, which, whatever its form or the wealth of rhetoric bestowed upon it, is alien to poetry. This is to be interpreted into no criticism of the many English literary products, which have the power to run and to fly; we could not spare one of the great pages of Carlyle, or of Mr. Ruskin; and yet it may well be doubted if, on the whole, the French have not been somewhat the gainers from the care with which they have customarily, and until lately, kept their prose and their poetry sundered.

Up to this point it has been our endeavor to establish the simultaneous existence of the restrictive as well as the romantic element in our literature as early as the reign of Elizabeth, to show the relation of the one to the other in the stretch of years that elapsed from her reign to that of Queen Anne, and to exemplify the relation of Jonson (who is claimed to be the exponent of the classical spirit) to his immediate contemporaries and to his two most typical successors. Let us now examine some of the reasons which may be urged for placing Jonson in so prominent a position.

In Ben Jonson we have the earliest example of the interesting series of English literary men who have had definite theories about literature. Dryden, Pope, and Wordsworth were such, each potent in moulding the taste of his own

age, and, with it, the course which literature was to take in times to come. It is notorious that the attitude of Jonson towards the prevalent literary taste of his age was far from conciliatory. He despised the popular judgment with an arrogance unparalleled in the annals of literature, although he constantly professed himself solicitous of the favorable opinion of the judicious. Jonson was a great moralist in his way, and "of all styles he loved most to be named Honest;"¹ but he was likewise an artist, and many of his current criticisms of his contemporaries: his strictures on Shakespeare for his anachronisms, on Sidney for making all the characters of the *Arcadia* speak like gentlemen and gentlewomen, his objection to the obscurity and irregular versification of Donne, are referable to an outraged aesthetic sense.² This position was altogether conscious, the position of the professional man who has a theory to oppose to the amateurishness and eclecticism abundantly exemplified in contemporary work; and Jonson must have felt toward the glittering, multiform literature of Elizabeth much what Matthew Arnold suffered "amid the bewildering confusion of our times" and might well have exclaimed with him, "I seemed to myself to find the only sure guidance, the only solid footing, among the ancients. They, at any rate, knew what they wanted in Art, and we do not. It is this uncertainty which is disheartening."³

The theories which Ben Jonson held about literature were from the first those of the classicist. He believed in the criticism of Horace and in the rhetoric of Quintilian;⁴ in the sanction of classical usage for history, oratory, and poetry. He believed that English Drama should follow the example of the *vetus comoedia*,⁵ and that an English ode should be modelled

¹Jonson's *Conversations with Drummond*, as above, p. 37.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 16, 2, and 3.

³Preface to Matthew Arnold's *Poems*, ed. 1854.

⁴See the many passages of the *Discoveries* which are no more than translations of the *Institutes*, and the weight given to the theories of Horace in the same book.

⁵Prologue to *Every Man out of his Humour*, Fol. 1640, i, 74.

faithfully on the structural niceties of Pindar. Despite all this, Jonson's theories about literature were not only, in the main, reasonable and consistent, they were often surprisingly liberal. Thus he could laugh, as he did, in a well known passage of the prologue to *Every Man in His Humour*, at the absurdities of contemporary stage realism which,

with three rusty swords,
And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words,
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars;
And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars;¹

and yet declare, as to that fetish of the supine classicist, the three unities, that "we [English playwrights] should enjoy the same licence or free power to illustrate and heighten our invention as they [the ancients] did; and not be tied to those strict and regular forms which the niceness of a few, who are nothing but form, would thrust upon us."² He could affirm that "Spenser's stanzas pleased him not, nor his matter;"³ and yet tell Drummond that "for a heroic poem there was no such ground as King Arthur's fiction" (i. e. the legends concerning King Arthur).⁴ He censured the pastoralists for their unreality, and yet he had by heart passages of the *Shepherds' Calendar*⁵ and showed how to write a true pastoral drama in the *Sad Shepherd*; he mocked the sonneteers,⁶ especially Daniel,⁷ in his satirical plays, for their sugared sweetness and frivolity, but wrote himself some of the finest lyrics of his age. The catholicity of Jonson's taste in its sympathy included the philosophy and eloquence of Lord Bacon, the divinity of Hooker, the historical and antiquarian enquiries of Camden and Selden, the classical scholarship of Chapman and the poetry of such diverse men as Spenser, Father Southwell, Donne, Sandys, Herrick, Carew, and his lesser "sons."⁸

¹*Ibid.*, i, 5.

²*Ibid.*, i, 74.

³*Conversations*, as above, p. 2.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷ See especially on this topic *The War of the Theatres* by J. H. Penniman, *Publications of the University of Pennsylvania, Series in Philology, Literature and Archaeology*, Vol. iv, No. 3, pp. 24-30, 53, 54.

⁸ See the *Conversations*, as above, *passim*.

The characteristics of Jonson as the exponent of the conservative spirit in literature in an age conspicuous for its passionate love of novelty are somewhat these: an unusual acquaintance with the literature of Greece and Rome, a holding of "the prose writers and poets of antiquity," to employ the happy phrase of the late Mr. John Addington Symonds, "in solution in his spacious memory," and a marvelous ability to pour them "plastically forth into the mould of thought;"¹ a keen appreciation of the principles which lie at the root of classical literature, with an intelligent recognition and a liberal interpretation of those principles in their adaptation to the needs of contemporary English conditions. The rhetorician in Jonson was alike his distinction and his greatest limitation. It was this which gave him an ever-present sense of an inspiring design, whether it was in the construction of a complete play or in the selection and ordering of the words of a single clause. These more general characteristics of the classicist will be recognized at once as Jonson's; but even the specific qualities that mark the coming age of English classicism are his. We have already remarked Jonson's fondness for satire and criticism, and his exceeding use of that species of applied poetry called occasional verse. Restriction in the range of subject is always attended by a corresponding restriction in style and form, and we are prepared to find in Jonson's occasional verse a strong tendency to precise and pointed antithetical diction, and a somewhat conventionalized and restricted metrical form. If we will look at Jonson's prose we shall find other "notes" only less marked of the coming classical supremacy, in his slightly Latinized vocabulary and in his occasional preference for abstract over concrete expression.

Take the following from the *Discoveries*: "There is a difference between mooting and pleading; between fencing and fighting. To make arguments in my study and to confute them, is easy; where I answer myself, not an adversary. So I can see whole volumes despatched by the umbractical

¹Ben Jonson, *English Worthies*, p. 52.

doctors on all sides but indeed I would no more choose a rhetorician for reigning in a school, than I would a pilot for rowing in a pond.”¹ And again: “When a virtuous man is raised, it brings gladness to his friends, grief to his enemies and glory to his posterity. Nay, his honors are a great part of the honor of the times; when by this means he is grown to active men an example, to the slothful a spur, to the envious a punishment.”²

Besides Jonson's several strictures on cross rimes, the stanzas of Spenser, the alexandrine of Drayton, English hexameters and sonnets, the very first entry of the *Conversations with Drummond* tells us of a projected epic with the added information “it is all in couplets for he detested all other rimes.”³ A little below Jonson tells of his having written against Campion's and Daniel's well-known treatises on versification to prove “couplets to be the bravest sort of verses, especially when they are broken like hexameters,” i. e., exhibit a regular caesural pause.⁴

The non-dramatic verse of Jonson was grouped by the author under the headings *Epigrams* and *The Forest*, both published in the Folio of 1616, and *Underwoods*, miscellaneous poems of the collected edition of 1640. Aside from his strictly lyrical verse in which Jonson shared the metrical inventiveness and variety of his age, the decasyllabic rimed couplet is all but his constant measure. For epistles, elegies, and epigrams, some two hundred poems, he seldom uses any other verse, and he employs this verse in translation and sometimes even for lyric purposes. In Jonson's hands the decasyllabic couplet became the habitual measure for occasional verse, and, sanctioned by his usage, remained such for a hundred and fifty years. But not only did Jonson's theory and practise coincide in his overwhelming preference

¹*Discoveries*, ed. Schelling, p. 16. Cf. also, “In her *indagations* often times new scents put her by, and she takes in *errors* into her by the same *conducts* she doth truths.”—*Ibid.*, p. 28.

²*Ibid.*, 42.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 2, 4, and 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 2.

for this particular form of verse, but the decasyllabic couplet as practised by Jonson exemplifies all the characteristics which, in greater emphasis, came in time to distinguish the manner and versification of Waller and Dryden. Moreover, the practice of no other poet exemplifies like characteristics to anything approaching the same extent until we pass beyond the accession of Charles I.

In an examination of the versification of several Elizabethan and later poets¹ for the purpose of establishing the

¹As to versification, the following passages have been considered as typical, one hundred lines in each case:

- 1591, Spenser: (a) *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, lines 1-100, Riv. Ed., p. 99.
 (b) " " " " 977-1077, p. 133.
- 1593, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, Sestiad I, lines 1-100, ed. Bohn, p. 157.
- 1598, Drayton, *Rosamond to Henry II, England's Heroical Epistles*, ed. Drayton, 1619, p. 105.
- 1600, Chapman, *Hero and Leander*, Sestiad VI, last 100 lines, as above, p. 226.
- 1603, Jonson: (a) *A Panegyry on the Happy entrance of James our Sovereign to his first high session of Parliment in this Kingdom*. Ed. 1640, i, 87.
- 1612 (b) *To Penshurst*, pr. in Fol. of 1616, ed. Bohn, p. 347.
- 1616 (c) The first XVII Epigrams and four lines of XVIII, excepting *Epig. VIII*, which is not in couplets, and *Epig. XII*, which has a peculiar movement, due to its subject, and is hence not a fair example, *ibid.*, pp. 283-88.
- 1623 (d) *An Execration on Vulcan*, p. 461.
- 1631 (e) *Elegy on Lady Winton*, p. 552.
- 1636, Sandys: (a) *Psalm LXXIII. Library of Old Authors, Sandys*, II, p. 204.
- 1638 (b) *Paraphrase upon the Book of Job*, *ibid.*, I, 1.
- 1641 (c) *Deo Optimo Maximo*, *ibid.*, II, 403.
- 1660, Waller: (a) *To the King*, ed. Drury, p. 163.
- 1678-80 (b) *On the Duke of Monmouth's Expedition*, 1678, 48 lines. *On the Earl of Roscommon's Translation of Horace*, 1680, 52 lines, ed. Drury, pp. 212 and 214.
- 1660, Dryden: (a) *Astraea Redux*, Globe ed., p. 8.
- 1687 (b) *Hind and the Panther*, *ib.*, p. 171.
- 1693 (c) *Epistle to Sir Godfrey Kneller*, *ib.*, p. 264.
- 1713, Pope: (a) *Windsor Forest*, Chandos ed., p. 95.
- 1732 (b) *Essay on Man, Epistle IV*, lines 19-110, *ibid.*, p. 218.

truth of this proposition, several things are to be noted. Spenser's use of the couplet, despite the early date of his only example (*Mother Hubbard's Tale*) and his conscious imitation in it of Chaucer, was found to stand as a very fair representative of the use of this metre by those who followed Spenser in other particulars of style and versification. Spenser's use of the couplet has therefore been employed as representative here. Thus although a certain rigidity of manner, that caused him all but to give up run-on couplets and lines, distinguishes the couplets of Drayton, and although Chapman shows a greater freedom and variety in the same respects, both these poets, with many others, their contemporaries, may be said to use the couplet in a manner in general resembling that of Spenser, and to group with him in not making a strong medial caesura a characteristic of their use of this verse. As we are not concerned with these poets in this discussion except so far as the determination that Spenser is representative of them, the figures which establish this point may be relegated to the note below.¹

In the case of Jonson a consideration of the length of his career and the variety of his practice demanded a wider range

¹This table may be compared with that of the text below, p. 238. The count is made upon the passages mentioned in the note preceding this, and the averages of Spenser and Sandys are repeated from the other table for convenience of comparison. It will be noted that Sandys corresponds to Drayton in his use of the continuous line, and to Marlowe in the frequency of the medial caesura, whilst his freedom in the run-on line exceeds even that of Chapman.

	SPENSER, 1591.	MARLOWE, 1593.	DRAYTON, 1598.	CHAPMAN, 1600.	SANDYS.
Run-on Couplets.....	5	2	1	12	5
Run-on Lines.....	19.5	11	4	28	22.6
Continuous Lines.....	59	51	46	55	47
Lines showing a Medial Caesura.....	35	40	44	38	40

from which to judge. The passages chosen range from 1603 to 1631, and include almost every species of poetry which Jonson wrote in this verse. Sandys exhibited an unexpected diversity of manner, although within a well defined range. The poem *Deo Optimo Maximo* is the only original poem of any length by Sandys: it has been considered with two translations. Lastly, the passages from Waller, Dryden, and Pope will be seen to take into consideration both the earlier and the later manner of each.

The points considered in this enquiry are (1) the number of the run-on couplets; (2) the number of run-on lines; (3) the character of the line as to internal caesura, especially in the contrast which exists between the continuous line (*i. e.*, one in which there is no internal caesura) and that exhibiting an internal caesura so placed as to produce the effect of splitting the line into two halves. This last results when the rhetorical pause occurs after the second stressed syllable or after either of the syllables following. This tendency to split the decasyllabic line into two is a notorious feature in the versification of the Popean School; as well as of Waller and Dryden. It is scarcely less marked in the verse of Jonson. The following table gives the average of all the passages examined and for each author:

	SPENSER, 1591.	SANDYS, 1636-1641.	JONSON, 1603-1631.	WALLER, 1660-1690.	DRYDEN, 1660-1687.	POPE, 1713-1732.
Run-on Couplets.....	5.	5.	4.4	3.5	.6	0.
Run-on Lines.....	19.5	22.6	21.8	12.5	7.6	5.5
Lines which show no Me- dial Caesura.....	59.	47.	26.	36.	36.3	21.
Lines showing a caesura after the fourth, fifth and sixth syllables.....	35.	40.	55.2	56.	53.	67.5
Lines showing a caesura after the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh sylla- bles.....	35.5	44.6	64.4	58.5	55.	71.

The following features appear:—

1. As to the run-on couplets, Jonson shows, with Sandys and Spenser, the earlier freedom, and shows it to about the same degree. But Waller shows it too, and his proportion in this respect (3.5) is far nearer to Jonson's (4.4) than to Dryden's (which is only .6). Pope gave up the run-on couplet. 2. As to run-on lines, Sandys exhibits a slightly larger proportion than Jonson or Spenser, but their averages (Spenser, 19.5, Sandys, 22.6, Jonson, 21.8) are substantially the same. It may be noted that Jonson's average in run-on couplets and verses falls in his *Epigrams* very nearly to that of Dryden in *The Hind and the Panther*; the former showing eleven run-on lines and the latter nine; both having two run-on couplets. But nearly the same is true of Sandys' *Paraphrase of the Psalm LXXIII*, in which there is but one run-on couplet and eleven run-on lines. On the other hand Sandys' freest verse in these respects, the *Paraphrase of Job*, surpasses the utmost freedom of Jonson. Thus as to run-on couplets and run-on lines, the test places Spenser, Sandys and Jonson in one group, with Waller and Jonson showing averages which dwindle to the stricter manner of Pope in these respects. It may be remarked in passing that it is a mistake to consider that the Elizabethans often practised the couplet with the freedom, not to say licence, that characterizes its nineteenth century use in the hands of such poets as Keats.

Now if these passages be considered with reference to the occurrence of a medial caesura and the contrasted non-occurrence of any caesura within the lines, they fall at once into two groups, (1) that of Spenser and Sandys, whose manner is continuous and whose use of the internal caesura is correspondingly infrequent;¹ and (2) that of Jonson, Waller, Dryden and Pope, whose manner is characterized by shorter clauses, inversions and interpolations, which breaks up continuity and prevailingly places the internal caesura within the range of the fourth and seventh syllables of the verse, posi-

¹ See note above, p. 237.

tions which tend to break the verse into two halves. The proportion of lines in which no medial caesura occurs is largest in Spenser, 59 being the average; Sandys' average is 47. Sandys' *Paraphrase of Psalm LXXIII* shows the highest number of continuous lines, 63; Pope's *Essay on Man* the smallest, 17. Jonson's average is but 26, showing a smaller average number of continuous lines than either Waller or Dryden, and approaching Pope's average, which is but 21.

The proportion of lines, which show a rhetorical pause or caesura after the second accent, after the arsis of the third foot, and after the third accent, hence producing the general effect of cutting the verse into two halves, are smallest in Spenser and Sandys, their averages being respectively 35 and 40 to each 100 lines. In Jonson the average of these lines rises to 55.2, which is greater than Dryden's 53; and nearly that of Waller, 56. It is interesting to note that Jonson's fondness for a pause after the arsis of the fourth foot (seventh syllable of the verse), which is shared by Pope, brings the averages of these two, by including that caesura with the count already taken of the caesuras of the three preceding feet, up to 64.4 per cent. for Jonson and 71 per cent. for Pope. In the use of this feminine caesura and the corresponding caesura of the previous foot (that after the third arsis), Jonson's verse is more like that of Pope than is Dryden's, whose preference is for the masculine caesura, *i. e.*, that after an accented syllable. It is not in the least here assumed that the versification of Jonson, Dryden, and Pope is all reducible to a single definition; but it is claimed that the characteristics of the versification of Jonson's couplets are of the type which, developed through Dryden and Waller, led on logically to the culmination of that type in Pope; and that no possible development of the couplet of Sandys and Spenser could have led to a similar result.

Examination has been made into the versification of this group of poets, not because peculiar store is set upon such matters, but because of the mistakes which have arisen in

consequence of the *obiter dicta* of Dryden and of Pope. It was sufficient for the subsequent "historians" of English Literature to know that in the rough draft of an outline of the course of English literature, communicated by Pope to Warburton, and preserved by Ruffhead, the great poet made Sandys in his *Paraphrase of Job* one of the originals of Waller in versification; the thing is copied forever after.¹ More important is the classical manner with its crisp diction, its set figures, its parallel constructions, its contrasted clauses, its inversions. Without pursuing this subject into minute detail, the following passages may be well compared.

In 1660 Dryden wrote thus :

And welcome now, great monarch, to your own,
Behold th' approaching cliffs of Albion :
It is no longer motion cheats your view,
As you meet it, the land approacheth you.
The land returns, and in the white it wears,
The marks of patience and sorrow bears.
But you, whose goodness your descent doth show
Your heavenly parentage, and earthly too,
By that same mildness, which your father's crown
Before did ravish, shall secure your own.²

In obvious further development of the same manner, Pope writes some seventy-five years later :

To thee, the world its present homage pays,
The harvest early, but mature the praise;
Great friend of liberty! In kings a name
Above all Greek, above all Roman fame:
Whose word is truth, as sacred as revered
As heav'n's own oracles from altars heard.
Wonder of kings! like whom to mortal eye
None e'er has risen, and none e'er shall rise.³

¹ See Ruffhead's *Life of Pope*, 1769, p. 410 *seq.*; also Pope, Amer. ed., 1854, i, clvi.

² *Astraea Redux*, Dryden, Globe ed., p. 14.

³ *First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace, To Augustus*, 1737, Pope, Chandos ed., p. 313.

Sandys wrote as follows in 1638, the year after the death of Jonson :

The Muse, who from your influence took her birth,
First wandered through the many-peopled earth ;
Next sung the change of things, disclosed th' unknown,
Then to a nobler shape transformed her own ;
Fetched from Engaddi spice, from Jewry balm,
And bound her brows with Idumaeen palm ;
Now old, hath her last voyage made, and brought
To royal harbor this her sacred fraught :
Who to her King bequeaths the wealth of Kings,
And dying, her own epicedium sings.¹

But Jonson had written thus, near the beginning of the reign of James :

Who would not be thy subject James, t' obey
A prince that rules by example more than sway ?
Whose manners draw more than thy powers constrain,
And in this short time of thy happiest reign,
Hast purged thy realms, as we have now no cause
Left us for fear, but first our crimes, then laws.
Like aids 'gainst treason who hath found before ?
And than in them how could we know God more ?
First thou preserv'd wert, our Lord to be,
And since, the whole land was preserv'd in thee.²

These four passages meet on the common ground of royal panegyric, and may be regarded as typical of the manner of each poet, and as abundantly upholding the conclusions already reached with respect to their versification.

If now we consider rhetorical structure and remember how true it is of the style of Pope that it is built upon antithesis and parallel construction, word against word, clause against clause, verse against verse, paragraph against paragraph, and what is more important, thought against thought, we shall find an interesting result. There is nothing antithetical in the prevailing style of Sandys, either in his translation—

¹ Dedication of *A Paraphrase upon Job*. Sandys, ed. *Library of Old Authors*, I, lxxix.

² *Epigram XXXV, To King James*, fol. 1641, 1, p. 12.

except so far as Hebrew parallelism may easily account for it—or in his original verse. On the other hand Jonson knew the value of antithetical construction and used it with intelligence and frequency, though not, as did later writers, almost to the exclusion of all other rhetorical devices. In the passages from Dryden and Pope quoted above, this characteristic appears as prevailing in both poets; but the quotation from Jonson also exemplifies antithetical construction in all its subtlety. The *prince* and his *subject* are contrasted; the *prince rules*, the *subject obeys*. The prince rules by *example* more than by *sway*; his *manners draw* more than his *powers constrain*. The subject fears his own *crimes* more than the prince's *laws*; and in the end the prince is preserved to be king, and his subjects are preserved in him; which last antithesis involves "conceit" as it often continued to do in Dryden as witness "the approaching cliffs of Albion" in the passage cited above.

The epigram of Jonson to King James, from which the lines above are taken, was written in 1604. The Panegyric on the same Sovereign's accession, written in the previous year and the earliest extended piece of Jonson's writing in couplets, shows beyond any cavil the beginnings of those qualities which, developed, differentiate the couplet of Dryden and Pope from others' usage of the same measure, and it displays what is more important, a treatment and mode of dealing with material, a diction and style which equally determine its kinship.¹

¹ I add some typical instances of Jonson's use of this structure out of the scores that can be culled from his pages. These will be seen to involve nearly all the mannerisms afterwards carried to so artificial a degree of refinement by Pope himself, and to hinge, all of them, on a pointed, condensed and antithetical way of putting things.

Call'st a book *good* or *bad* as it doth sell. *Epigram* 3.

And I a *poet* here, no *herald* am. *Epig.* 8.

He that dares *damn* himself, dares more than *fight*. *Epig.* 16.

Blaspheme God greatly, or some *poor hind* beat. *Epig.* 28.

Look not upon thy *dangers*, but our *fears*. *Epig.* 51.

An examination of Jonson's use of the couplet through successive years exhibits less advance towards the later regularity than might have been supposed, and it can hardly be affirmed that Jonson was any more rhetorically constructive in his later writings than in those composed when his classical theories were new and strong upon him. We cannot expect the laws which govern organic growth to coincide with those controlling constructive ingenuity; a house is built, a tree grows, and the conscious and self-controlled development of such a man as Jonson is alien to the subtle and harmonious unfolding of a genius like Shakespeare's. What we do find in Jonson's use of the devices of the later classicists is a full recognition of their actual value, and an application of each to the special needs and requirements of the work which he may have in hand. Thus he employed the couplet for epigram and epistle alike, but used it with greater terseness and

At once thou *mak'st* me happy and *unmak'st*. *Epig.* 55.

And hoodwinked for a man, embrace a post. *Epig.* 58.

Active in's brains and passive in his bones. *Epig.* 68.

And no less wise than skilfull in the laws. *Epig.* 74, p. 21.

The ports of Death are sins, of Life, good deeds. *Epig.* 80, p. 23.

In making thy friends books, and thy books friends. *Epig.* 86, p. 24.

That dares not write things false, nor hide things true. *Epig.* 95.

And study conscience more than thou wouldst fame. *Epig.* 98.

Truth might spend all her voice, fame all her art. *Epig.* 106.

And first to know thine own state, then the state's. *Epig.* 109.

He wrote with the same spirit that he fought. *Epig.* 110.

They murder him again that envy thee. *Epig.* 111.

Til thou canst find the best choose the least ill. *Epig.* 119.

And in their error's maze, thine own way know,
Which is to live to conscience not to show. *Ibid.*

That strives his manners should precede his wit. *Epig.* 121, p. 39.

Outdance the babion, or outboast the brave. *Epig.* 130, p. 41.

Men love thee not for this, they laugh at thee. *Ibid.*

The learned have no more privilege than the lay. *Epig.* 132, p. 42.

For fame with breath soon kindled, soon blown out. *Ibid.*

In place of scutcheons, that should deck thy hearse,
Take better ornaments, my tears and verse. *Epig.* 27, p. 10.

more in accord with later usage in the former, feeling that fluency and a somewhat negligent manner at times were fitting to epistolary style. The latter can be found in any of the *Epistles*. No better specimen of Jonson's antithetical manner could be found than the fine epigram to Edward Allen:—

If Rome so great, and in her wisest age,
 Fear'd not to boast the glories of her stage,
 As skilful Roscius, and grave Æsop, men,
 Yet crown'd with honors, as with riches, then;
 Who had no less a trumpet of their name,
 Than Cicero, whose every breath was fame:
 How can so great example die in me,
 That, Allen, I should pause to publish thee?
 Who both their graces in thyself hast more
 Out-strippt, than they did all that went before:
 And present worth in all dost so contract,
 As others speak, but only thou dost act.
 Wear this renown. 'Tis just, that who did give
 So many poets life, by one should live.¹

The liberality of Jonson's spirit, despite his own strong preferences, caused him likewise to admit into his practice

Believe it, Guilty, if you *lose your shame*,
 I'll *lose my modesty*, and tell your name. *Epig.* 38, p. 13.

That we *thy loss* might know, and thou our *love*,
 Great heav'n did *well*, to give *ill* fame free wing. *Epig.* 51, p. 15.

Nay ask you how the day goes in your ear
 Keep a star-chamber sentence close twelve days
 And *whisper* what a *proclamation* says. *Epig.* 92, p. 26.

It is the *fair acceptance*, Sir, creates
 The *entertainment* perfect, not the *cates*. *Epig.* 101, p. 30.

And did not shame it by our *actions* then
 No more than I dare now do with my *pen*. *Epig.* 108, p. 34.

Thou rather striv'st the matter to possess
 The *elements* of honor than the *dress*. *Epig.* 109, p. 34.

I modestly quit that, and think to write
 Next morn *an ode*; thou mak'st a *song* e'er night. *Epig.* 112, p. 35.

I pity thy ill luck
 That both for *wit* and *sense* so oft doth pluck. *Ibid.*

But *blood* not *minds*, but *minds* did *blood* adorn,
 And to *live great*, was better than *great born*. *Epig.* 116, p. 37.

Who sees a soul in such a body set
 Might love the treasure for the cabinet. *Epig.* 125, p. 39.

¹*Epigram LXXXIX*, fol. 1640, 1, p. 25.

forms which theoretically he disapproved. He had the sanction of Catullus and Tibullus for his lyrics, but he even stooped to write a few sonnets, to bits of pastoral in the prevailing mode like a *Nymph's Passion*, and to *concetti* after the manner of the Marinists, like the dainty trifle, *That Women are but Men's Shadows*. This eclecticism of practice in the great classical theorist combined with the strong influence of Donne's subtle novelty of treatment and the older romantic influence of Spenser, perpetuated in men like Drayton, Drummond and the later Spenserians, delayed the incoming tide of classicism, which setting in, none the less, about the time of the accession of Charles I, became the chief current until after the Restoration, and reached its full when Milton, the last of the Elizabethans, died.

Nothing could more strongly exemplify this eclecticism in the practice of Jonson than the fact that two such diverse men as Robert Herrick and Edmund Waller were alike his poetical "sons." Herrick, the man, has a naïve and engaging personality, which is choice, though not more sterling than the solid worth of Ben Jonson himself; whilst the frank Paganism of Herrick, the poet, and his joy in the fleeting beauties of nature are things apart from Jonson's courtly and prevailingly ethical appraisalment of the world. Notwithstanding, Herrick had his priceless lyrical gift of Jonson, though he surpassed his master in it. Unhappily for his fame, he inherited also Jonson's occasional grossness of thought, his fondness for the obscenities of Martial, and he surpassed his master in this as well. Waller's debt to Jonson is also two-fold: in the lyric, which he impoverished and conventionalized, and in occasional verse, for which he possessed a peculiar talent, and which he freed of the weight of Jonson's learning, his moral earnestness and strenuousness of style, codifying the result into a system which was to give laws to generations of poets to come. Waller was a man, the essence of whose character was time-serving, to whom ideals were nothing, but to whom immediate worldly success, whether in

social life or letters, was much ; a man whose very unoriginality and easy adaptability made him precisely the person to fill what Mr. Gosse deftly calls the post of "Coryphaeus of the long procession of the commonplace." The instinct of his followers was right in singling Waller out for that position of historical eminence, not because, as a boy, he sat down and deliberately resolved on a new species of poetry, but because he chose out with unerring precision just those qualities of thought, form and diction which appealed to the people of his age, and wrote and re-wrote his poetry in conformity therewith. In Carew, Waller found the quintessence of *vers de société*, and "reformed" it of its excessive laces and falling-bands to congruity with the greater formality which governed the costume of the succeeding century. Lastly, (in Jonson he found an increasing love of that regularity of rhythm which results from a general correspondence of length of phrase with length of measure, amongst much with which he was in little sympathy, a minute attention to the niceties of expression, a kind of spruce antithetical diction, and a versification of a constructiveness suited to the epigrammatic form in which the thought was often cast.) In Sandys, Fairfax, Drummond and some others, he found a smoothness and sweetness of diction, in which these poets departed measurably from their immediate contemporaries and preserved something of the mellifluousness of the Spenserians. With almost feminine tact Waller applied these things to his unoriginal but carefully chosen subject-matter, and in their union wrought his success.

The real value of the following age of repression consisted in its recognition of the place that the understanding must hold—not only in the production of prose—but in the production of every form of enduring art. It endeavored to establish a standard by which to judge, and failed, less because of the inherent weakness of the restrictive ideal, than because the very excess of the imaginative age preceding drove the classicists to a greater recoil and made them

content with the correction of abuse instead of solicitous to found their reaction upon a sure foundation. The essential cause of this great change in the literature of England, above all question of foreign origin, precocious inventiveness of individual poets, artificial and "classical heroic couplets," lies in the gradual increase of the understanding as a regulative force in the newer literature, the consequent rise of a well-ordered prose, and the equally consequent suppression for several decades of that free play of the imagination which is the vitalizing atmosphere of poetry.

Making due allowance for the existence of many concurrent forces, English and foreign, which made for the coming age of repression, but which it is not within the province of this paper to discuss, it has been the endeavor of this enquiry to establish the following points:—

1. That the position of Ben Jonson was such as to give a sanction and authority to his opinions and practise above any man of his age.

2. That Jonson's theories were those of the classicist from the first, though put forward and defended with a liberality of spirit and a sense of the need of the adaptation of ancient canons of art to changed English conditions, that warrant the use of the term, assimilative classicism, as applied to these theories.

3. That the practice of Jonson as exemplified in his works exhibits all the "notes" of this assimilative classicism; amongst them *in subject*, a preference for applied poetry over pure poetry, as exemplified in his liking for satire, epigram, translation and occasional verse; *in treatment*, a sense of design and construction, repressiveness and selectiveness, a feeling for brevity and condensity, a sense of finish, and the allusiveness of the scholar; *in diction*, qualities distinctive of the coming "classical" age, such as care in the choice of words, a slightly Latinized vocabulary, the employment of a spruce, antithetical style, and the use of parallel construction and epigram; *in versification*, a preference for the decasyllabic

couplet and the writing of it in a manner, which is distinguishable from the continuous manner of Spenser, but which contains all the distinctive characteristics which, developed, led on to the later use of this measure by Waller, Dryden and Pope.

4. That these theories and practices of Jonson are traceable in his work from the first, and in their range, consistency, and intensity antedate similar theories and practise in the works of any other English writer.

From all this is derived the conclusion that there is not a trait which came to prevail in the poetry of the new classic school as practised by Waller and Dryden, and later by Pope, which is not directly traceable to the influence or to the example of Ben Jonson. We cannot but view with renewed respect a genius so overmastering that it became not only the arbiter of its own age, but gave laws which afforded sanction and precedent to generations of successors.

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